

Commercial and Industrial Buildings,
Dubuque Seed Company Warehouse
169-171 Iowa Street
Dubuque
Dubuque County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-160-I

HABS
100A,
31-DUBU,
13-I-

DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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IOWA,
21-171,
13-I-

Site Location: 169-171 Iowa Street
Dubuque, Dubuque County, Iowa
DOT designation: Resource Site No. 7.3
USGS quadrangle: Dubuque South Iowa 7.5'
Lot dimensions : 36.5' x 113' : .09 acre
Lot description: City Lot 198 and South
4'5" of City Lot 197

Present Owner: Iowa Department of Transportation
Present Usage: 1st and 2nd floors: retail gift shop
3rd and 4th floors: vacant
Present Condition : fair / good

Overall Dimensions: 37' x 113'; four stories

Orientation : east

Architectural

Description :

Plan type : rectangular; 4-story open plan warehouse.
Foundation: coursed limestone ashlar perimeter walls.
Structure : wood frame with masonry bearing walls.
Ext. walls: common red brick laid in common bond.
Roof : flat composition roof with brick parapet walls.
Chimneys : six brick exterior chimneys on party walls.
Windows : painted wood 4/4 double-hung windows on front
upper levels, with segmental brick arch heads
and stone lug sills; multi-light steel indus-
trial windows with wood lintels and stone lug
sills more recently cut into south party wall.
Openings : full-width, six-bay first floor cast iron
storefront, with double-leaf doors with wood
panels and fixed lights.
Details : modestly corbeled brick cornice on front para-
pet; ornamental cast iron storefront manufac-
tured by Iowa Iron Works of Dubuque; company
signs painted in bands on front and south side;
silhouette mural recently painted on north side
party wall.

Construction Date : 1885

Architecture Style: 19th Century Functional

Physical History : Known locally as the Dubuque Seed Company Warehouse, this structure in fact comprises the southernmost two bays of a five-bay warehouse built on the corner of Second and Iowa Streets. Archival evidence indicates that the four-story building was constructed for the V.J. Williams Implement Company in 1885. The 34,000 square-foot warehouse was divided into two

unequally sized open-space warehouses by a full-height brick fire wall (that forms the north party wall of the the existing building; the remaining section represents approximately a third of the original building's size). In 1889-90 the firm moved its operation to Main Street. After standing vacant briefly, the north portion of the warehouse was occupied by John Melhop, Sons and Company, which had moved from Main Street. With John Melhop as president; H.H. Melhop, vice president; W.L. Orrick, secretary; and J. Melhop, assistant secretary, this wholesale grocery firm had been established in 1853 and incorporated in 1891. The south part was occupied by the G.H. Hammond Packing Company, local producer for the National Beef Company. Both firms remained in the building until after the turn of the century. By 1903 Melhop had ceased operations.

Eight years later, the Dubuque Paper Company occupied the south portion; the M.M. Johannsen Candy Company used the north part as a factory. Established in 1907 with E.J. Johannsen as president and M.M. Johannsen (relationship unknown) as secretary, Johannsen marketed candy throughout Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois. "The building containing the offices, factory and ware rooms, consists of a four story structure and basement. The company employs a corps of seventy people, who are thoroughly experienced in the business of candy making," a 1911 gazetteer reported. "The leading specialty is the Elk Sealed Ribbon Chocolates. Other specialties are Marshmallows, High Gloss Hard Goods, Pecan Air O. Milk Chocolates and Marachino Cherries. The popularity gained by these sweets is a source of great satisfaction. Each year the quality has been improved upon and new confections have been frequently created." The Dubuque Paper Company moved into its own recently completed warehouse [HABS No. IA-160-N] in 1914. By that time Johannsen had moved to a different location on Second Street. The building was then occupied by the Considine Toy Company and the Licorice Products Company before the entire structure was acquired by the Dubuque Seed Company in the early 1930s. At some time during the latter company's tenancy, the north portion of the warehouse was razed. The Dubuque Seed Company has used this structure to clean, dry and store agricultural seeds until recently. It now houses a retail gift shop on its lower two floors.

Significance: Born June 1832 in Meigs County, Ohio, V.J. Williams moved to Dubuque twenty years later. Here he worked as a pattern maker for the Rouse and Treadway foundry. In 1858 Williams became a partner in the foundry; two years later, he founded the V.J. Williams Implement Company. After serving in the Civil War, Williams returned to Dubuque and resumed business in partnership with H.B. Gillford. Williams reacquired sole interest in 1868 and incorporated the company in February 1884 with a capitalization of \$50,000, building this four-story building the next year. Prominent Dubuque businessmen A.A. Cooper and James Beach, who maintained other primary businesses, served as president and vice president respectively; Williams functioned as general manager. In addition, he served as the city's postmaster, county treasurer, director of the Dubuque County Bank, director of the Fire Association and director of the Building and Loan Association. By 1887 Williams's company grossed \$250,000

annually with an eleven-man staff operating in this warehouse. "The company do [sic] a jobbing business in Agricultural Implements and are Western Agents for the sale of superior plows, dump rakes, mowers, feed mills, threshers, reapers, thresher engines, hay carriers, etc." a gazetteer stated that year. "This house possesses every facility for the expeditious receipt and shipment of goods, and in the management and general conduct of its affairs the officers give their personal attention to every detail." Neither Williams's company nor any of the subsequent tenants produced a major impact on Dubuque commerce. The building derives its significance largely from its degree of architectural integrity. Although more than half of it has been demolished, the remaining section displays a high degree of integrity, and its cast iron first floor storefront remains in place, unaltered. The Dubuque Seed Company Warehouse thus serves as a relatively well preserved example of 19th century industrial architecture.

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Compiler:

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December 1988.